

BEXHILL

town centre policies
1976-86



ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Thanks are due to the following organisations who accepted the Council's invitation to contribute to the preparation of the report:

Devonshire Road Traders, Bexhill Hotels Association, Bexhill Chamber of Commerce, Sackville Road Traders Association, Hastings District Association of Estate Agents, Association of Bexhill Citizens.

Following publication of the draft report in October 1976 comments were invited from the public, organisations, and the County Council, resulting in this amended version being approved by the Council on 14th February 1977.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Following the Council's instructions to prepare a detailed policy for the future of office and shop development in Bexhill Town Centre, a report was published in June 1976 which set out the topics to be covered together with some basic facts for discussion between members, officers and other groups representing the business interests in the town. The result of these discussions - deliberately held before any firm plans or policies were formulated - was to identify the key areas where there were problems and opportunities. Whilst there was not unanimity as to the size or degree of any problem there was a common sense of purpose in seeking to maintain and improve the prosperity of the town.
- 1.2 It should be said now, lest anyone obtain a false impression, that Bexhill is an attractive town to live, work and shop in - it is clean, its shops are generally of good quality, still offering a personal service; it is flat, with reasonably accessible bus and train services and by and large it is relatively easy to park a car. Compare that with its nearest major rival and one can see it has a great deal to offer.
- 1.3 What is necessary however is to highlight those few areas where problems have or are likely to arise - loss of shops to offices, parking, loss of housing to offices etc., and to decide what action, if any, to take. Similarly one needs to take the positive attributes of the town and aim to maximise these. What we have done therefore is to concentrate on the problems and advantages - suggest solutions and practical ways of assisting the prosperity of the centre. We have avoided the temptation to produce yet another detailed and comprehensive planners' plan - basically on three counts - there is not much wrong with the town centre which demands any radical changes - there are very few resources both public and private to direct to any major schemes - we need policies and action now to maintain our relative role with other centres, particularly Hastings.
- 1.4 Members will see from what follows that we have produced a number of policies to try and resolve some of the problems and an action check list which will hopefully provide the centre with that little extra impetus to improve its prosperity now, in these difficult times. The report has been prepared within the framework of the Council's already approved local plan objectives, i.e.:
 - a) The provision of appropriate housing, employment, and other facilities to give local young persons a significantly better opportunity than at present to remain within the local community and contribute to its well being.
 - b) To give specific consideration for the needs of existing residents in the older age groups with respect to transport, environment and social services, to enable Bexhill to better fulfil its legitimate role as a retirement town.
 - c) That Bexhill's role as a holiday centre should be maintained and improved.

2. Summary

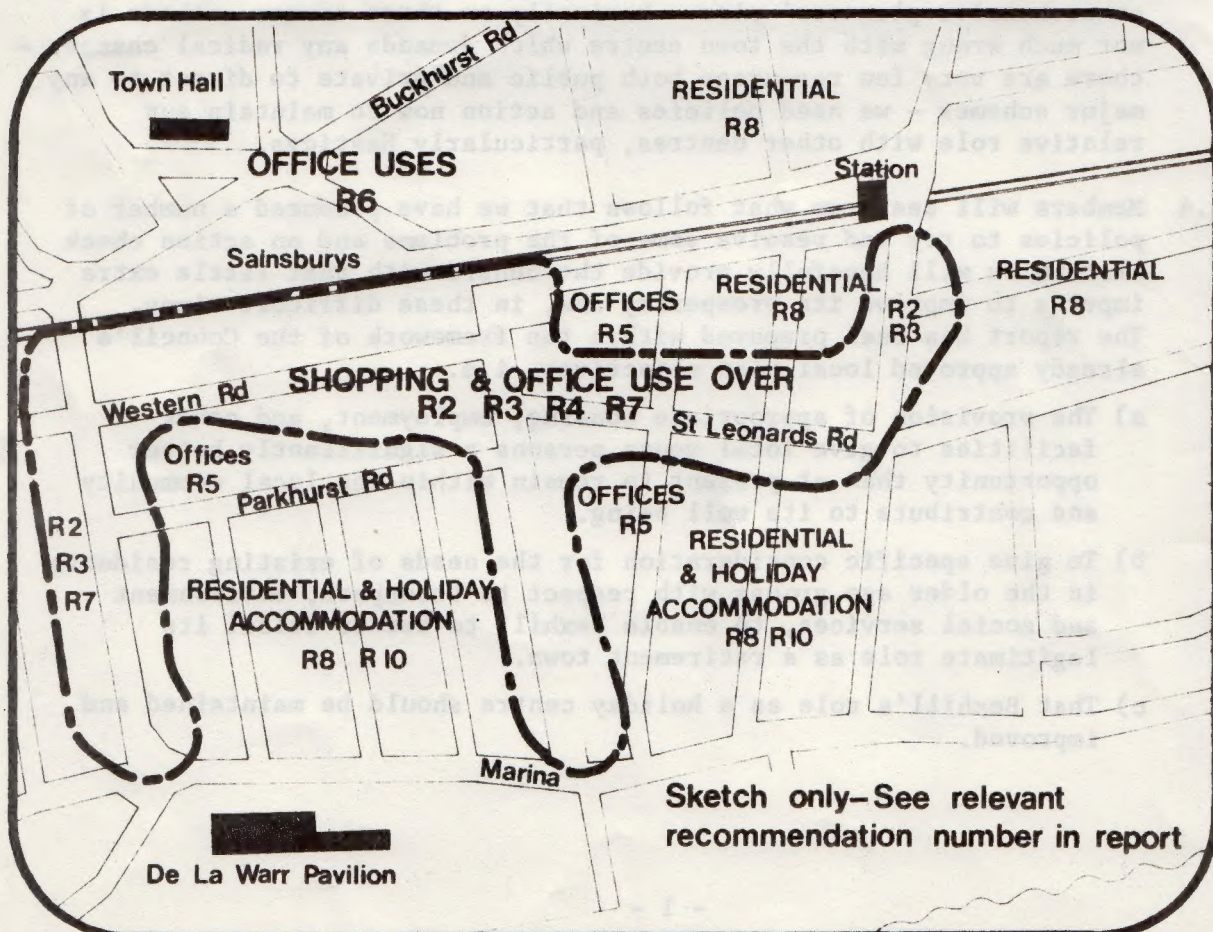
2.1 The proposals, detailed in subsequent sections of the report recognise inter alia that -

- the centre is primarily for business and shopping purposes and that more priority should be given to such uses.
- the standards of car parking provision required for new development which were economically acceptable some years ago are not viable now.
- more free on-street parking is required and off-street parking should be provided at the earliest possible time.
- the tourist role of Bexhill has changed and that encouragement needs to be given to the self-catering holiday accommodation potential which seems to be the trend as well as the normal hotel facilities - particularly linked to the Battle Abbey as a major tourist generator.
- the residential element in the centre needs clearly identifying and protecting.

2.2 The figure below sketches out the general land use strategy for the centre.

Figure 1

GENERAL LAND USE STRATEGY



2.3 Some of the policies contained in the report can be implemented by the Council in its role of controller of development, others are reliant entirely for implementation upon the actions of others. Set out below is an action check list of things which the Council might consider appropriate to further its objectives. It is recommended -

R.1 That the action check list below be approved.

- a) Circulate copies of the final approved report to all estate agents, surveyors, architects and bankers in the town and make it available free to all business, commercial, consumer and other interests.
- b) Invite British Rail to consider shop and office development over the railway at Devonshire Square.
- c) Invite the towns traders who close at lunchtime to consider staying open (several comments were made on this point).
- d) Promote Bexhill as a seaside resort, linked with Battle Abbey - not only at home but abroad - and provide additional funds for such publicity.
- e) Ask the County Council to provide some of the money already allocated for promoting the Hastings and Bexhill area so that we can advertise our office and industrial potential (not all our industrial sites are fully occupied).
- f) Strongly urge the County Council to reconsider the parking restrictions in the centre with a view to providing more free on-street parking.
- g) Continue to pressure the Southern Water Authority to give priority to improving the towns drainage system, so that development is not inhibited.
- h) Invite the towns business representatives and consumer groups to discuss informally with members and officers the progress and current situation on the town centre at regular intervals.

3. Problems

- 3.1 The discussion report, consultations and informal meetings with interested parties helped to identify the main fields which are of concern to members, local associations and the public:
- a) CAR PARKING and the increasing difficulty which shoppers are experiencing in obtaining parking space within reasonable distance of their shopping destinations. This situation is worsened by the fact that few shops now deliver goods.
 - b) NON-SHOPPING USES deteriorating from the attractiveness and success of the shopping areas, especially Building Society Branches and Banks.
 - c) COMMERCIAL USES and the apparent conflict between the need to provide additional space and the wish to retain residential uses within the town centre.
 - d) TOURISM as a source of income and employment in the town centre - and in the town as a whole - is felt to represent a lost opportunity to utilise the towns existing and costly resources of seafront, parks, etc.
- 3.2 These four problem areas are examined in detail in the context of the five predominate use functions of the town centre :- Shopping, Offices, Housing, Tourism and Car Parking.

4. The Context

- 4.1 The Bexhill Town Map approved in 1962, allocated land in the town centre for various uses but restricted them primarily to shopping and residential. The plan did not differentiate between different types of commercial use, or types of use on different floors. The town map is in fact little more than the results of a land use survey carried out in the 1950's, and is therefore outdated and not very helpful in encouraging investment or confidence in the town centre. The approved town map will not be superseded by the adoption of this report's recommended policies, this can only happen when a formal local plan is prepared, the policies can however, be used by the Council in the control of development and the Department of the Environment will respect the adopted plan on its merits.
- 4.2 The County Structure Plan poses a threat and a challenge to Bexhill town centre prosperity by encouraging competition and development in Hastings, including the provision of a new district centre to the west of Hastings. Although development to the north of Bexhill might increase the long term catchment area of the town centre the loss of any of the existing shoppers to alternative centres could be a permanent damaging feature. A strong plan, designed to build upon the existing local will to hold Bexhill's trading position, is necessary as a foundation for the opposition already expressed by this Council in relation to the County Structure Plan's shopping policies.
- 4.3 The Bexhill Plan - Town Centre and Seafront was published by consultants to the former Borough Council in 1967 and rejected by the Council primarily for its high content of suggested redevelopment. The idea of comprehensive and enforced redevelopment is still unpopular, and even less likely of implementation now than it was nine years ago. Although in one sense the ideal way of revitalising a town centre,

it is clear that any plan for Bexhill town centre must seek to minimise its dependance on major redevelopment as a means of achieving increased prosperity in the short term.

- 4.4 Access to the town centre which, because of the relative absence of through traffic is good now and likely to improve on construction of the Old Town By-Pass.

5. The Approach

- 5.1 Having established from the discussion report what major problems were considered by members and local associations to exist in the centre, surveys and research were designed to assess their extent. A building and land use survey was carried out in July from which the number and types of shop in the centre were obtained together with the location of residential, office and other uses on all floors. This survey was related to the known changes which have taken place in the shopping area between May 1972 and May 1976 to assess whether any trends were taking place.
- 5.2 A comparison between Bexhill and other similar towns in the south of England was carried out from the 1971 Census of Distribution and a brief sample analysis of the representation of national multiple shops. Two surveys of the cars parked in the town centre were carried out on Thursdays, July 22nd and August 12th between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. inclusive. The surveys only included cars parked in permitted on-street parking areas and public off-street car parks with the exception of Sainsbury's car park, which was included in the survey to assess the degree to which it is being used. The results of the two surveys were consistent in most respects and it is considered therefore that they represent a reasonably accurate picture of the weekday parking situation during the summer months.

6. Shopping in the Centre

- 6.1 The comparison research and analysis indicated that Bexhill has below average financial turnover per square foot of shopping floor-space. This is of some importance, indicating as it does the apparent potential for growth in trade by a more intensive use of existing floorspace.
- 6.2 In formulating policies which seek to establish confidence it is important to examine the present distribution of types of shop and any recent changes that have taken place. Over 70% of the centre's shops are located in Sackville Road, Western Road, Devonshire Road and St. Leonards Road, the remaining 30% being distributed in the remainder of the study area (Sea Road, London Road, Marina, etc.). The town centre's "Service" shops (restaurants, hairdressers, dry cleaners, etc.) are less evenly distributed with just over one half of the total number being situated in the four main shopping streets, concentrating on the Sackville Road area (25%), Western Road and St. Leonards Road have fewer service shops (9% and 8% respectively) than Devonshire Road (17%).
- 6.3 An analysis of changes over the last four years has revealed no indication of a trend with the majority of changes being from one sort of retail shop to another. Of the changes that represented permanent losses from shop use the majority were to either an office type of use or a restaurant and most of these took place in Devonshire Road and Devonshire Square (6 out of 20 changes), and Sackville Road (6 out of 25 changes). The total losses over the whole centre were not however significant (19 out of 114 changes) and were offset by the 17 gains from non-shop use or vacant shop, to shop use.
- 6.4 An essential part of any shopping centre is the representation of regional and national multiple shops which assist in attracting shoppers (and to some extent other traders). A comparison with other towns has indicated that Bexhill is somewhat under-provided with multiple shops. It is now an unfortunate trend for such shops to concentrate their activities in larger towns and the recent closure of Burtons and Oakeshotts in Bexhill illustrates this point. While the independant trader in a town like Bexhill is an indispensable feature, usually providing the type of personal service welcomed by the towns older residents, the presence of well known multiples provide an attraction for shoppers with spin-off benefits to both types of organisations. There is little direct action the Council can take to attract more multiple shops or to prevent existing ones from closing but indirectly we can attempt to create a good shopping atmosphere with good facilities.
- 6.5 It is considered that concentrating new investment in shopping areas will benefit traders and shoppers alike and that any further dispersal of new shopping uses in the town centre will tend to detract from its attractiveness to shoppers. The loss of existing retail shopping uses on the ground floor to non-shopping uses (other than Building Society Branches, Banks or Estate Agents dealt with in paragraph 6.7) is generally undesirable especially in the Western Road, Devonshire Road and St. Leonards Road area and it is recommended that in the area shown in figure 2:-

R.2 Retail shopping uses on the ground floor should continue to predominate but that outside this area new retail shopping uses within the town centre will only be favourably considered in exceptional circumstances.

6.6 The distribution of shops in the central area emphasises the two functions which it performs in serving both a resident population and a visitor/holidaymaker population. The normal resident's first requirement is for attractive shops offering every day and weekly needs, it is also convenient for the resident shopper to be able to use the service shops, restaurants, etc., which are the holidaymakers first requirements. The holidaymaker gains his secondary requirement by having an attractive complex of shops in which to window-shop or browse through. The two functions are therefore linked and their successful relationship and potential for expansion is considered to be essential to the prosperity of the town centre. In this respect both Sackville Road and Sea Road are important by providing an attractive "entrance" to the town centre and seafront and providing opportunities for the location of restaurants and holiday type uses which are essential to the town's attractiveness as a resort.

6.7 Much concern has been expressed about the location of non-shopping uses in the main shopping streets with particular reference to Building Society Branches and Estate Agents. There is little, if any, direct evidence to support the view that these uses are harmful to the centre as a shopping area while they remain relatively dispersed. On the contrary Building Society Branches frequently instal attractive, bright fascias and Estate Agents usually rely on an attractive window display as part of their business. Both types of business involve frequent pedestrian visits.

The Building Societies role in Bexhill is probably of considerably more importance than one would normally expect, due to the proportion of retired people in the town. However, it is clear that arguments against a ban on Building Society/Estate Agent use are dependant upon non-shopping uses being dispersed among existing retail uses: once a concentration of such uses builds up, retail premises and sections of streets are likely to become isolated and suffer accordingly. It is recommended that this aspect should be given due weight when considering proposals for development, bearing in mind the overall policy (R2) and that in the area indicated as R3 in figure 2:-

R.3 Consideration of ground floor non-shopping uses will be based upon the individual merits of each proposal, but with the presumption against such uses unless there is a demonstrable need for a main shopping street location. However, in the case of Sackville Road and Sea Road (part) ground floor non-shopping uses catering for holidaymakers will be acceptable.

6.8 Furthermore, to strengthen the over-riding policies R2 and R3 of ensuring that retail shopping uses predominate in the central area, and to avoid the undue increase of non-shopping uses in the main shopping streets it is recommended that in Western Road, St. Leonards Road, Devonshire Road and Devonshire Square as indicated as R4 in figure 2:-

R.4 Ground floor non-shopping uses will only be favourably considered where:-

- (a) the ratio of non-shopping units to the total number of units in the lengths of street as defined below is not increased to more than one out of four; and

- (b) not more than one out of four adjacent units are in non-shopping use.

Lengths of street:-

Devonshire Road east between Devonshire Square and Marina.
Devonshire Square and Devonshire Road west to Marina.
Western Road north between the Library and Devonshire Road.
Western Road south between Sackville Road and Devonshire Road.
St. Leonards Road north between Devonshire Road and Sea Road.
St. Leonards Road south between Devonshire Road and Sea Road.

NB.1. for the purpose of this policy a non-shopping use is defined as one in which the primary use is any use other than the retail sale of goods (not services) to the general public.

2. for the purpose of this policy a unit is defined as a shopping or non-shopping use trading under one name and/or identifiable length of frontage (e.g. Woolworths and Longleys are each considered to be one unit).

6.9 The ratio of 1 out of 4 in R4 has been chosen because the implementation of the policy while not totally prohibiting new non-shopping uses throughout the centre, will ensure that the existing situation will not worsen in the more sensitive parts of the main shopping streets.

6.10 Proposals for non-shopping uses within the town centre but outside the areas indicated in figure 2 will be considered with respect to the other policy recommendations of this report.

FIGURE 2
SHOPPING USES



See relevant Recommendation number in Report

7. Offices

- 7.1 Office uses are an important part of the town centre's prosperity providing employment opportunities for people, who also tend to utilise the facilities provided in the town centre. The town centre is the traditional location of business uses which being centrally located benefit the town's population in terms of convenience.
- 7.2 There are some 92 office uses in the town centre (including Banks and Building Societies), the majority of which are small firms located in properties often providing sub-standard accommodation. When the economy improves it is likely that demand will increase for expansion of existing professional offices (Solicitors, Architects, etc.), or that a demand for new office sites will arise. In the short to medium term such a demand will fall on existing properties and it is considered appropriate for this plan to identify where such changes of use will be acceptable to the Council.
- 7.3 The identification of the areas in Eversley and Parkhurst Roads indicated in figure 3 as acceptable for office uses has three advantages:
- a) It seeks in the long term, to ensure that residential uses are not sited to the rear of shops in the prime shopping streets where opportunities for the rear extension of shops could be denied because they were detrimental to the adjoining residential use.
 - b) Eventual small-scale office redevelopment could take place in these areas with opportunities to provide rear access to shops in the prime shopping streets and/or to provide temporary car parking.
 - c) The Parkhurst Road area could provide a reasonable area for a concentration of non-shopping uses linking Sackville and Devonshire Roads more firmly but avoiding the loss of prime shopping frontage.
- It is recommended therefore that (see figure 3).
- R.5 On the west side of Eversley Road and the north side of Parkhurst Road the policy should be to give favourable consideration to office uses on all floors, and to redevelopment of premises for office purposes subject to normal planning requirements and wherever practical the provision of access to the shopping area onto which the sites back.
- 7.4 Office uses elsewhere in the centre tend to be concentrated in the Town Hall Square/Buckhurst Road area and it is considered that this area is the most suitable to be identified with any new major office use. Sites in this area have good access to the centre's road pattern, railway station and a potentially excellent pedestrian link direct into the heart of the shopping centre (see R.15). It is recommended therefore that (see figure 3).
- R.6 The area in the vicinity of Town Hall Square be identified as suitable for office use (including redevelopment).

7.5 The desirability of permitting office uses on the upper floors of shops has been the cause of some concern over the last few years. In the main, existing office uses on upper floors are confined to Devonshire Road, Devonshire Square, some of St. Leonards Road and a limited number in Sackville Road. It is estimated however, that there are also a considerable number of vacant properties on the upper floors of shops (or offices) in Devonshire Road and Western Road which, because of legal difficulties, owners are reluctant to let to residential users. This indicates a source of supply in the central area for small office accommodation which should not be suppressed if priority is to be given to maximising the centre's prosperity. It is undesirable for office uses to take place above residential uses and such uses should be confined to the existing business area.

It is recommended therefore that (see figure 3).

R.7 In general favourable consideration will be given to changes of use for office development on the upper floors of properties in Sackville Road, Western Road, Parkhurst Road (north side), Devonshire Square, Devonshire Road, St. Leonards Road, Eversley Road (west side), Sea Road (part) except where the floor below is in existing residential use.

FIGURE 3

OFFICE USE



See relevant Recommendation number in Report

8. Homes in the Centre

- 8.1 The existing housing provision in the centre appears to satisfy a demand from the over-60's and could provide the small type of accommodation suitable for newly married couples. It is thus clear that there is a continuing role for housing in the Town Centre and that so far as is possible residential amenities should be protected: It is recommended therefore that in the areas shown in figure 4.

R.8 The predominant use be residential on all floors, and subject to normal planning requirements proposals for residential redevelopment will in general receive favourable consideration.

"Normal planning requirements" in this instance includes the protection of adjoining residents' amenity, the provision of on-site parking, the control of building heights and the necessity temporarily to impose certain restrictions on development due to the current drainage embargo.

- 8.2 New residential uses elsewhere in the town centre should be considered on their individual merits with regard to the other policy recommendations of this report.

- 8.3 The policies relating to the location of shop and office use in the central area may give the impression that the Town Centre Plan proposals imply a major loss of residential accommodation - in fact, taken in conjunction with R.8 above there is more likely to be a gain in town centre accommodation than a loss. This is because changes from residential to office use are only likely to become significant when the economy picks up....but once this happens the experience of the early 1970's suggests that residential redevelopment to higher densities will re-commence. Even now there is a considerable backlog of unutilised planning consents for residential redevelopment with blocks of flats.

9. Tourism

- 9.1 In the past Bexhill played a much larger role in providing for the holidaymaker and built up the expertise and facilities to take advantage of its natural attractions. While there has been a decline in the latter decades, as in many English seaside resorts, the inherent qualities still remain together with some of the best facilities (the De La Warr Pavilion). Irrespective of the present economic down turn, there appears to be two long term trends in the tourist industry: (a) an increase in European holidaymakers, visiting London and the South East primarily, and (b) a trend towards self catering holidays. A potentially important element of the town's prosperity is its ability to still attract holidaymakers whether in self-catering accommodation or in hotels and guest houses, which if given encouragement could well contribute to maintaining and increasing the tourist role of Bexhill sufficient to provide additional revenue to improve the existing facilities in the town. An improvement which would also assist the established hotels and guest houses to attract more custom. It is recommended therefore that:

R.9 Proposals for changes of use of existing properties to hotel/guest house/self catering use will in general be considered favourably by the Council, (excluding use of the ground floor in those areas where it is the Council's policy that retail uses should predominate, R.2).

- 9.2 Though it is the Council's policy to encourage new hotel development, this is unlikely to take place in the medium term. However, should the demand arise, it is felt that this should be accommodated in the traditional location - on the "seafront", i.e. on the Marina, and at the southern end of Sea Road as indicated in figure 4 and it is recommended that:

R.10 Redevelopment for hotel purposes within the town centre should, in the main, take place in The Marina and southern part of Sea Road.

Proposals for hotel redevelopment elsewhere in the town centre should be considered on their individual merits having regard to normal planning requirements and the policy recommendations of this report.

FIGURE 4

RESIDENTIAL & TOURIST USES



Note R9 applies generally to the Town Centre area.

See relevant Recommendation number in Report

10. Car Parking

- 10.1 This subject caused more discussion and variation in views than any other. The fact is that relative to places like Hastings and Eastbourne it is easier, more convenient and cheaper to park in Bexhill and therein lies one of the towns current main advantages. However the situation is not ideal and will deteriorate as car usage increases unless additional parking provision is made. It is unlikely that we shall be in a position to provide additional off-street parking in the short term and consequently every opportunity for increasing on-street parking capacity should be sought.
- 10.2 The parking survey indicated that around 78% of cars parked on-street in the central shopping area (shown in figure 5) want to stay for less than 1 hour, while 15% want to stay for between 1 and 2 hours, and 7% more than 2 hours. This result is significant in that there is a danger that the existing relatively high turnover of spaces in the shopping streets could decrease if people took full advantage of the present 2 hour limit. This could make it more difficult for shoppers to find parking space especially in Sackville Road, Western Road, Devonshire Road, Devonshire Square, St. Leonards Road and the northern part of Sea Road. An effect of this could be to force people regularly to park in the residential roads of Linden, Albany, Albert and Wilton, where there is some spare capacity. It is suggested that reducing the present 2 hour limit to 1 hour in these shopping streets would :-
- a) satisfy the present majority demand for parking duration;
 - b) encourage an increase in the turnover and availability of parking spaces; which would
 - c) increase the attractiveness of Bexhill as a shopping centre and thus help to reinforce and increase the prosperity of its shops.
- Similarly it is felt that the present parking pattern in Parkhurst Road and the Marina contribute to the centre's effectiveness and that they should meet the shoppers' short term parking needs.

It has been suggested that parking spaces are being unnecessarily lost at the junctions of one-way streets due to stringent application of double yellow lines without regard to actual traffic flows. It is recommended therefore that (figure 5).

- R11 The County Council be requested to review the present waiting regulations in Sackville Road, Western Road, Devonshire Square, Devonshire Road, St. Leonards Road, Sea Road (north of St. Leonards Road), Parkhurst Road and The Marina, with a view to reducing the present 2 hour waiting limit to 1 hour.
- As part of this review the present application of junction waiting restrictions in one way streets be examined with a view to reducing such restrictions to a minimum.
- 10.3 Recommendation R11 is a short-term measure, which, while providing additional availability of spaces, does nothing to provide additional capacity, and could eventually be a self-defeating "improvement" to the town centre leading to congestion and unnecessary vehicle movement in the centre's prime shopping streets.
- 10.4 Policies recommended earlier in this report propose areas where changes of use or redevelopment can take place. A major issue facing the Council in attempting to encourage new investment in the town centre is to what extent it should insist on parking provision being made on each development site. There are three basic arguments against this :-

- a) It results in a number of traffic generators in an area where they are least welcome, frequently creating vehicle movements through the principal shopping streets and frustrating any long-term plans for reducing or eliminating traffic from these streets.
- b) It results in a number of private parking spaces which are not available to shoppers and which are likely to be underused on Saturdays when perhaps they could be of most use.
- c) To insist on the provision of on-site parking spaces on town centre sites often results in the development not being economically viable and thereby deters potential developers and new investors.

R12 It is recommended therefore that in the interests of giving every possible encouragement to new investment in the town centre the following provision should be made for on-site parking spaces:

a) Changes of Use :

- to shops - NONE*
- to offices - NONE*
- to residential - 1 garage space per house,
1 space per flat plus 1
visitor space for every
5 flats.
- to hotel/visitor accommodation - NONE*

b) New development or redevelopment (excluding any major proposals) :

- for shops - NONE
- for offices - NONE (within the central area
shown in fig. 5)
- 1 space/500 sq. ft.
(outside the central area)
- for residential - 1 garage space per house
1 space/flat plus 1 visitor
space for every 5 flats
- for hotel/visitor accommodation - 1 space for two bedrooms

NB The above standards relate to development carried out in accordance with the policies of this report - for development not in accordance with the policies, and development not classified above, parking provision on-site may be required in accordance with the Council's general parking standards.

* NOTE - except where there is space around the buildings at street level which could be readily used for car parking purposes.

10.5 If it is accepted that the above three arguments are valid, it becomes the Council's responsibility to ensure that the properly located provision of off-street parking space is made to cater for both the shopper and the private spaces lost in the relaxation of parking standards. The problem remains as to how the provision of such space should be financed - should the Council bear the burden on the basis that the incentive given to new investment by the relaxation of parking standards will result in a more

prosperous future for the centre to the benefit of all, or should developers be required to contribute commuted car parking payments towards the provision of a car park? The latter course is the Council's current policy at £1000 per space and the limited experience of its application indicates that it is a deterrent to prospective developers. It is my view that the commuted parking policy is inappropriate in the present economic climate and on at least one occasion has denied Bexhill of a small shopping redevelopment. In order to give an incentive to new investors it is recommended therefore that :

- R13 Until such time as the Council is committed to securing parking provision in the area identified in R15, there be no further contributions required under the commuted car parking policy. That this policy be the subject of review at periodic intervals and as circumstances require.

This policy should give a "breathing-space" for new investment while the Council seeks to find off-street parking space. As soon as a site is identified and negotiations for parking provision finalised, the Council can then consider the re-application of the commuted parking policy to help finance the provision.

- 10.6 The current demand for off-street parking in the central area during the working day is some 300-400 spaces in the town centre's only two off-street public car parks at the Pavilion and Eversley Road. Of the cars parked in the Pavilion almost half stayed for more than 2 hours with there being virtually no spare capacity on the second day of survey. The Eversley Road car park remained virtually full on both days of the survey with over 80% of the cars staying for more than 2 hours. Neither car park therefore has much scope for absorbing additional off-street parking demand, in the summer months at least.
- 10.7 A new site or sites need to be found for off-street parking space. The question is whether to concentrate spaces into one off-street car park with the difficulty of finding a suitable site, the expense in assembling land and its construction, or whether to disperse spaces into several smaller sites which might be easier for the Council to provide but could present problems of management and increased traffic generation in undesirable places. The suggestion, primarily on practical grounds is that a combination of the two approaches be made in the medium and long term which would move us towards a solution to providing adequate parking in the town centre.
- 10.8 Two areas have already been recommended as being suitable for office uses on all floors :- the west side of Eversley Road, and the north side of Parkhurst Road, and it is felt that these areas offer the best potential for medium term use as car parks and long term use for office redevelopment with rear service access to Western or Devonshire Roads. The earmarking of a site by the Council does not imply its immediate use as a car park, which might be undesirable on aesthetic, environmental or practical grounds, but it could continue to be used for housing purposes or let for offices or similar uses. It is recommended that in the areas referred to :
- R14 The Council would welcome the opportunity to consider the acquisition of land to achieve the objectives of securing improved car parking provision in the medium term.

- 10.9 It is felt that the most suitable area to identify for achieving the long term objective of a major single off-street car park is to the north of Devonshire Square. A car park in this area would enjoy direct vehicular access from the major approaches to the town centre from the north, east and west, while providing the opportunity for a pedestrian link across the railway into the heart of the shopping area. It could also provide parking for railway users and partially meet the requirements of any new office developments in Town Hall Square.
- 10.10 It must be recognised though that the provision of this car park (originally envisaged as a multi-storey over the existing Sainsbury car park) is beyond the present means of the Council. It is important for this plan to identify the area and for the Council to agree to take advantage of any redevelopment proposals or offers of land in the area in order to work towards the eventual implementation of a car park and pedestrian link. In this respect any future payments made under the commuted car parking policy could be directed to achieving this aim. It is recommended therefore that :-
- R15 The Council pursues the long term aim of securing a car park in conjunction with any major redevelopment which takes place on land to the north of Devonshire Square, together with a pedestrian access to Devonshire Square or Western Road.
- 10.11 It is not possible to be specific at this stage about the exact location or size of the proposed car park. Both depend on what land becomes available and when, and whether or not the Recommendation of R14 has helped the short and medium term situation. It is considered sufficient at this stage to identify the general area in which a car park should be situated with the details awaiting a more favourable economic climate.

FIGURE 5

CAR PARKING



See relevant Recommendation number in Report

11. The Future

- 11.1 The foregoing sections of this report are intended to identify the action which can be taken which could alleviate some or most of the problems of the town centre over the next 10 years. There are other opportunities for the enhancement of the centre which have not been mentioned merely to avoid the creation of an expensive "shopping list". However, despite this it is in my view, right to look ahead and take some view of the future and how we would like to see the town centre evolve.

This section then, sets out the longer term possibilities, not for a decision but to indicate that nothing in the short to medium term policies will prejudice their eventual adoption given the right circumstances. Indeed some short term policies will work towards the eventual achievement of the long term possibilities.

11.2 Redevelopment

The area where the best opportunity arises for a redevelopment that would enhance the town centre is the northern side of Devonshire Square. Although constrained by the railway line and thus implying building over the line at this point, a redevelopment scheme here could provide a fourth side to the square and emphasise it as a focal point of the town centre. Redevelopment could be associated with shops on the ground floor, offices above and with a pedestrian link to a car park.

11.3 Pedestrianization

There is a general consensus of agreement that pedestrianization of part of the centre is a desirable aim. There can be no question of its provision until adequate alternative parking and service access is available for the streets in question. Western Road, Devonshire Square and part of Devonshire Road offer the best opportunity in terms of attractiveness to shoppers. In the meantime however, all available measures should be taken to improve facilities, e.g. bus shelters, seats, lowered kerbs, etc. for pedestrians - particularly the elderly and less mobile.

11.4 Service Access

The provision of rear service access to the prime shopping streets is difficult to achieve because of the large number of individual owner-ships involved and the lack of space for the provision of vehicle turning facilities, particularly to the north of Western Road. It is considered therefore that the provision of rear access could be achieved gradually from the north side of Parkhurst Road and the west side of Eversley Road (see Recommendation R5). Rear access to the north side of Western Road and the west side of Devonshire Square remains a problem which I do not think can ever be a really practical proposition. If the pedestrianization of these Streets is to be seriously considered then a compromise solution of allowing limited access by service vehicles only is probably the best answer.

11.5 Pedestrian Link over the Railway

The proposal for a pedestrian link across the railway into Devonshire Square or Western Road is still a desirable feature in increasing the attractiveness of the town centre.

There are basically three alternatives for a link :

- 1) The original Bexhill M.B. scheme for a subway beneath the railway at 16/16a Western Road (in the Council's ownership). Rejected by Bexhill M.B. in January 1973 on grounds of the cost at £60,000.
- 2) A proposal by the Chamber of Commerce for a ramped bridge from the south-east corner of Sainsbury's car park across the railway on to a disused platform and into the north-west corner of Devonshire Square.
- 3) Provision of the link as part of an overall redevelopment associated with the construction of an off-street public car park (see R15).

The construction of a bridge in isolation from any imminent off-street car park proposal will be difficult to justify economically and the long term solution appears to be (3). However the Chamber of Commerce's approach to Sainsbury's on solution (2) should be supported in principle as a positive effort to take advantage of Sainsbury's for the rest of the town centre.

11.6 Traffic Management

When adequate provision has been made for off-street parking, service access and pedestrianization, traffic flows in the town centre could be revised with a view to minimising unnecessary traffic movements. Alterations to traffic flows created by the Old Town By-Pass in the late 1970's could also result in an opportunity to improve parking and circulation in Town Hall Square.

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